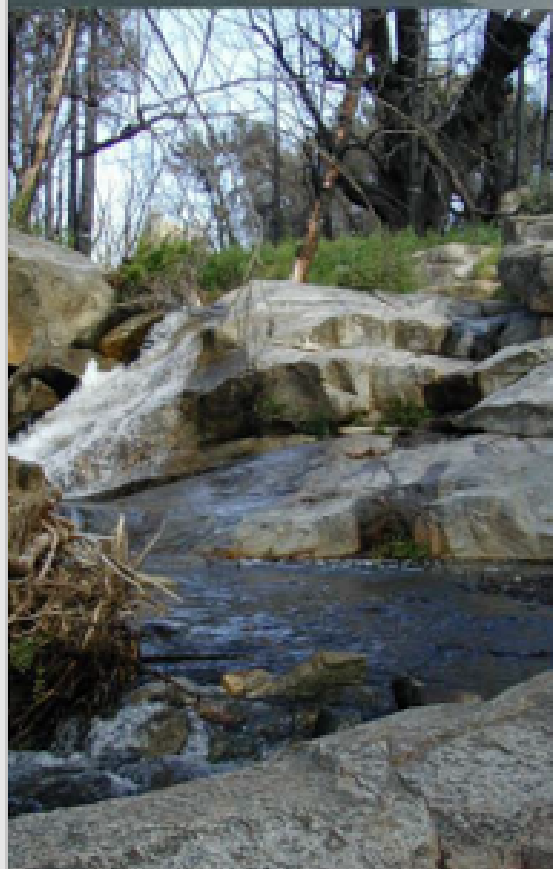




**2021 Triennial Review of the  
Water Quality Control Plan for the  
San Diego Basin  
Preliminary List**



June 18, 2021

California Regional Water Quality Control Board  
San Diego Region

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor  
JARED BLUMENFELD, Agency Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency



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## **2021 Triennial Review**

### **Introduction**

The *Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin* (Basin Plan) designates beneficial uses for water bodies in the San Diego Region and establishes water quality objectives and implementation plans to protect those beneficial uses. State and federal laws require periodic review of the Basin Plan.<sup>1</sup> Because federal law requires review every three years, the Basin Plan review is also referred to as the “triennial review.”

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region (San Diego Water Board) is initiating its 2021 triennial review of the Basin Plan (Triennial Review). The purpose of the review is to identify necessary updates and revisions to water quality standards and other elements of the Basin Plan. The triennial review assists the San Diego Water Board in identifying potential priority issues to address through subsequent Basin Plan amendment projects.

In this document, the San Diego Water Board staff identifies a preliminary list of basin planning projects (preliminary projects) for consideration in the 2021 Triennial Review. The preliminary projects represent the important basin planning items that also support the goals of the San Diego Water Board’s [Practical Vision](#). The purpose of identifying these preliminary projects is to solicit input from interested persons that will help the San Diego Water Board prioritize Basin Plan amendment projects that will best address the water quality needs of the San Diego Region. Additional projects may be identified during the public process.

### **San Diego Water Board Practical Vision – Healthy Waters, Healthy People**

The Practical Vision is a strategy that focuses the San Diego Water Board’s limited resources to achieve our region’s highest goals for healthy waters. The Practical Vision furthers our agency’s mission to protect, enhance and restore the quality of California waters in the San Diego Region so that our communities can use and enjoy these waters. It sets a plan to achieve healthy waters through collaboration, reliance on the latest science, prioritization of issues and actions, and prudent use of our authorities in service to the people of California.

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<sup>1</sup> State law requires basin plans to be periodically reviewed [Water Code §13240]. Federal law requires water quality standards to be reviewed every three years [Clean Water Act §303(c)(1)].

## **2021 Triennial Review**

The Practical Vision identifies critical factors necessary to achieve healthy waters throughout the San Diego Region using our core values of leadership, stewardship, communication, and transparency. The San Diego Water Board will prioritize Basin Plan amendment projects that align with our values and the Practical Vision.

Additional information on the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision can be found at: [http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water\\_issues/Practical\\_Vision](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/Practical_Vision).

## **Basin Plan Triennial Review Process**

Federal law requires a review of water quality standards at least once every three years. Water quality standards consist of beneficial use designations, water quality criteria (referred to as water quality objectives in California) necessary to protect those uses, and an anti-degradation policy. In addition, state law requires Basin Plans be periodically reviewed and revised if necessary. The last Basin Plan Triennial Review was conducted in 2018.

The 2021 Basin Plan Triennial Review process will include a preliminary list of priority projects, a public workshop, tribal summit, comment period, and a public hearing. To formally conclude its Basin Plan review, the San Diego Water Board adopts a resolution approving the review and a prioritized list of suggested Basin Plan projects. Placing a project on the priority list will prompt San Diego Water Board staff to investigate the need and appropriateness for a Basin Plan amendment to meet agency goals. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, a Basin Plan amendment may or may not be developed and adopted.

The San Diego Water Board is allocated limited personnel years (PYs)<sup>2</sup> annually from the General Fund to administer the Basin Plan program, which includes implementing Triennial Review projects. This preliminary list is based on an expectation that resources from the General Fund will remain consistent for the next three years.

## **Public Participation and Basin Plan Review Schedule**

Public participation is an important part of each Basin Plan Triennial Review. The Board and staff are committed to transparency and communication. Interested persons will have an opportunity to participate during a public workshop, Tribal Summit, written comment period, and hearing. The purpose of the workshop and Tribal Summit is to inform participants about the triennial review process, facilitate discussion and obtain feedback on the preliminary list of projects, and identify additional potential projects from all interested persons.

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<sup>2</sup> A personnel-year (PY) is equivalent to one staff member working full time for one year.

## **2021 Triennial Review**

Interested persons also have an opportunity to submit written comments during the 60-day comment period. Staff will assess written comments and incorporate them, where appropriate, into the final report prepared for San Diego Water Board approval at a subsequent public hearing. Written comments on this document must be submitted by August 17, 2021 to [sandiego@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:sandiego@waterboards.ca.gov) with “2021 Triennial Review Comment: 442887” in the subject line.

The schedule for the 2021 Basin Plan Triennial Review is as follows:

|                                       |                 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Public Comment Period Begins          | June 18, 2021   |
| Public Workshop (virtual)             | July 20, 2021   |
| Tribal Summit (virtual)               | August 4, 2021  |
| Public Comment Period Ends            | August 17, 2021 |
| Public Hearing on Final Priority List | Fall 2021       |

The San Diego Water Board encourages input from interested parties. Persons interested in receiving announcements about the Basin Plan triennial review may subscribe to the “Basin Planning Issues” electronic mailing list at: [http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email\\_subscriptions/reg9\\_subscribe.shtml](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/reg9_subscribe.shtml).

You do not need to re-subscribe to the electronic mailing list if you already are subscribed to the previous triennial review e-mail list for the San Diego Region.

## ***2021 Triennial Review***

### **Preliminary Project Descriptions for 2021 Basin Plan Review**

San Diego Water Board staff have prepared the following preliminary list of projects for consideration in the 2021 Triennial Review. Given that the number of potential Basin Plan amendments identified exceeds expected available personnel resources, the preliminary project list is divided into priority categories (1-4). Resource allocations are based on a project's priority status, with Priority 1 and 2 projects receiving the highest ranking. Priority categories 3 and 4 are considered for project development if resources and readiness allow. In developing this list, staff considered projects identified in the Practical Vision, the key beneficial uses and key areas concept of [Resolution R9-2017-0030](#), projects identified as priority projects for the 2018 Basin Plan Triennial Review, and projects that address challenges, obstacles, or opportunities arising since the 2018 review. In addition, the following criteria were also taken into consideration when evaluating proposed projects:

- Protection and Restoration – The project advances the mission of protecting and restoring healthy waters in the San Diego Region.
- Reasonable and Efficient – The San Diego Water Board has or can leverage resources (e.g., expertise, technology, and data) that are able to achieve the project goals within a reasonable timeframe. The project advances the San Diego Water Board's goal of ensuring limited resources are put to the best possible use.
- Community Involvement – The project is of high public interest and is appropriately addressed through a Basin Plan amendment.

The preliminary list of projects represents water quality issues that are important to the San Diego Water Board and consistent with the Practical Vision.

## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 1: Designation of Tribal Tradition and Culture (CUL), and Tribal Subsistence Fishing (T-SUB) Beneficial Uses to Surface Waters in the San Diego Region**

**Priority: 1**

**Goal:**

Establish new tribal beneficial use designations, where appropriate.

**Discussion:**

This project would designate surface water bodies, where appropriate, with the CUL and T-SUB (tribal) beneficial uses. This is the second phase of the project. Phase one was completed with the adoption of Resolution No. R9-2020-0254 which incorporated tribal beneficial uses into the San Diego Region Basin Plan. During Phase two of the project, the San Diego Water Board will work with tribes within its region to identify water bodies appropriate to designate with tribal beneficial uses. This project will most likely extend beyond the 2021 triennial review cycle.

This is a timely project because the San Diego Water Board has been selected as a pilot region for the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP), Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program Realignment. The goal of the realignment is to consider subsistence and tribal uses when selecting SWAMP bioaccumulation monitoring sites and species. The process includes the development of advisory committees to facilitate the identification and prioritization of sites and species in the Region to be added to future sampling efforts. Additionally, in July 2020, the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (SCTCA) was awarded a \$50,000 CalEPA Environmental Justice Small Grant to identify watersheds within the San Diego Water Board's jurisdiction where Native American cultural uses are occurring and where water quality standards are needed to ensure vulnerable populations are protected. The project will use geographical positioning systems to identify the locations of cultural resource areas subject to current, past, or potential future use. Geographical information systems will be used to categorize and delineate the areas and inform the basin planning process.

**Practical Vision:**

- Chapter 1 – Strategizing for Healthy Waters
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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 2: Tijuana River Valley Water Quality Restoration**

**Priority: 1**

**Goal:**

Develop Total Daily Maximum Loads (TMDLs) with implementation plans for REC-1 and solid waste in the Tijuana River Valley.

**Discussion:**

The San Diego Water Board 2018 triennial review identified the Tijuana River Valley Water Quality Restoration as a priority project. On October 10, 2018, the San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution No. R9-2018-0123, which directed staff to begin work on the development of an amendment to the Basin Plan to establish an implementation plan for TMDLs for indicator bacteria and trash in the Tijuana River.

During this phase of the project, the San Diego Water Board will continue work on development and approval of TMDLs for indicator bacteria and trash in the Tijuana River. Specifically, as part of this triennial review project, staff will complete the peer and public review processes, continue to coordinate with stakeholders, and prepare a Basin Plan amendment for adoption by the San Diego Water Board, State Water Board, Office of Administrative Law, and the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). It is anticipated draft documents will be available to the public in fall 2021.

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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 3: Biological Objectives for Water Bodies in the San Diego Region**

#### **Priority: 1**

#### **Goal:**

Incorporate biological water quality objectives into the Basin Plan.

#### **Discussion:**

The San Diego Water Board 2014 triennial review identified the amendment of the Basin Plan to incorporate biological water quality objectives as a high priority project to protect and restore beneficial uses associated with aquatic and aquatic dependent wildlife for the region's streams. On May 13, 2015, the San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution R9-2015-0043, which directed staff to begin working on the project to amend the Basin Plan to incorporate biological water quality objectives. In December 2020, the San Diego Water Board adopted Resolution No. R9-2020-0234 which amended the Basin Plan to incorporate general narrative guidance for the development of biological objectives and to incorporate a numerical biological water quality objective for perennial and seasonal streams, where applicable, using benthic macroinvertebrates and the California Stream Condition Index (CSCI).

During this phase of the project, the amendments adopted in December 2020 by the San Diego Water Board will be brought before the State Water Board for consideration, which includes an additional public review process. If adopted by the State Board, the amendments would then be submitted to the Office of Administrative Law and USEPA for review and approval.

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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 4: Contact Water Recreation (REC-1) Water Quality Objectives**

**Priority: 2**

**Goal:**

Initiate the development of a narrative objective that would allow the use of human specific markers while being protective of the REC-1 beneficial use.

**Discussion:**

This project was first introduced during the 2014 Triennial Review. At the time, the focus of the project was to determine whether and to what extent data supported amending the objectives, implementation provisions for applicable bacteria TMDLs, or the TMDLs themselves. [Bacteria TMDLs](#) were adopted in June 2008 and February 2020. In July 2018, San Diego Water Board staff prepared a summary report of the 2014 REC-1 Triennial Review Project that made recommendations on next steps. Recommendations were based on discussions and feedback from external and internal workgroups as well as the various technical studies that had been completed to date. During the 2018 Triennial Review, the focus for the project shifted towards implementation of actions that were identified in the 2018 recommendations report. The short-term actions included updates to the existing storm water permit, audits of Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination programs, updates to waste discharge requirements for sanitary sewer systems, and updates to Chapter 3 in the Basin Plan.

The goals of this phase of the project are:

1. Initiate the development of a narrative risk-based objective that would be protective of the REC-1 beneficial use; this work would also establish a numeric translator for HF183 (a human-specific bacteria indicator) to implement the narrative objective.
2. Initiate a Basin Plan amendment project to revise the requirements and/or provisions for implementing the bacteria TMDLs in the San Diego Region. The bacteria TMDLs currently include Revised Project I - Twenty Beaches and Creeks in San Diego Region (including Tecolote Creek) and Project II - Baby Beach in Dana Point Harbor and Shelter Island Shoreline Park in San Diego Bay; however, this project would focus on amending the 20 Beaches and Creeks Bacteria TMDL.

The new objective would supplement, rather than replace, current statewide objectives contained in the Inland Surface Waters and Enclosed Bays and Estuaries Plan and the California Ocean plan. Furthermore, compliance with both new and existing objectives may be required in order to ensure protection of the REC-1 beneficial use.

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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 5: Evaluation of Water Quality Objectives for Total Dissolved Solids in the Middle San Juan and Middle Trabuco Groundwater Basins**

**Priority: 3**

**Goal:**

Evaluate and potentially revise the Water Quality Objectives (WQOs) for total dissolved solids (TDS) in specific groundwater basins identified in the Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP) for South Orange County.

**Discussion:**

The Water Quality Control Policy for Recycled Water (Policy) was adopted by the State Water Board to encourage the safe use of recycled water from wastewater sources while protecting public health and the environment. Salt and Nutrient Management Plans (SNMPs) are included in the Policy to achieve or ensure compliance with water quality objectives for salts and nutrients and ensure protection of beneficial uses by implementing basin-wide management of salts and nutrients in groundwater.

If a regional water board accepts, through a Board Resolution, a final SNMP that includes a modification of a water quality objective in its implementation plan, the Policy directs the regional board to initiate a process to amend the basin plan based on the accepted SNMP and any other associated documentation.

The proposed project will evaluate and possibly revise WQOs for TDS in the Middle San Juan and Middle Trabuco groundwater basins. The goal of the project is to determine if relaxing groundwater WQOs to accommodate an increase in recycled water use will be protective of beneficial uses in the subareas. The evaluation findings may result in Basin Plan amendments to groundwater WQOs. Increasing the amount of recycled water use in an area often causes a corresponding decrease in the quality of the water. In order to accommodate a recycled water use increase in the region, the San Diego Water Board may need to evaluate if a change to water quality objectives will still be protective of all current and potential beneficial uses in the area.

Specifically, as part of this triennial review project, staff would evaluate available data in the SNMP, and other associated reports or documents, to determine if a change in WQOs would be protective of beneficial uses. The timeline for this project is dependent on 1) the submittal of a Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP), which is expected in Summer 2021 and 2) acceptance of the submitted SNMP by the San Diego Water Board.

## ***2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST***

### **Practical Vision:**

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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 6: Santa Margarita River Nutrient Total Maximum Daily Loads**

**Priority: 3**

**Goal:**

Adoption of Total Maximum Daily Loads.

**Project Description:**

The Santa Margarita River was added to the 303(d) list for nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) in 2012. Excessive nutrient loading to the Santa Margarita River and its tributaries cause and/or contribute to exceedances of Water Quality Objectives and adversely impact the Cold Freshwater Habitat (COLD), Warm Freshwater Habitat (WARM), and Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species (RARE) beneficial uses designated to the Santa Margarita River. Excessive discharge of nutrients also has the potential to adversely impact the Municipal and Domestic Supply (MUN) beneficial use through impact to large groundwater basins in the Santa Margarita watershed. Furthermore, nutrients discharged to the surface waters and groundwater in the Santa Margarita watershed have been shown to contribute to the impairment of the Santa Margarita River Estuary.

To address the impairment for nutrients and eutrophication, the San Diego Water Board is currently developing a Water Quality Restoration Plan (Restoration Plan) for the Santa Margarita River with numerous stakeholders to ensure that discharges to the river do not exceed the capacity (or maximum daily load) the river can assimilate while still providing its designated beneficial uses. This project follows the Water Quality Restoration Project for the Santa Margarita River Estuary which led to Investigative Order No. R9-2019-0007<sup>3</sup>. Major sources of nutrients to the River and Estuary include Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) located in San Diego and Riverside counties and U.S. Marine Corps Camp Pendleton, leaking septic systems, and irrigated lands. The Santa Margarita River Restoration Plan is being developed in collaboration with a stakeholder process which involves coordination with the Santa Margarita River Nutrient Initiative Group (SMRNIG). San Diego Water Board staff and SMRNIG are currently running technical analyses necessary to develop management and implementation plans. Staff expects to bring the Santa Margarita River Restoration Plan for the San Diego Water Board's consideration in 2023.

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<sup>3</sup> [Investigative Order](#) for the cities of Murrieta, Temecula, and Wildomar, the counties of San Diego and Riverside, the Riverside Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and the United States Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton to Design and Implement a Water Quality Improvement Monitoring and Assessment Program for Eutrophic Conditions in the Santa Margarita River Estuary and Watershed, California.

## ***2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST***

### **Practical Vision:**

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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 7: Review of Shelter Island Yacht Basin (SIYB) Copper TMDL and/or Implementation Plan**

**Priority: 4**

**Goal:**

Evaluate data to determine whether revisions to the TMDL or its implementation plan are needed.

**Discussion**

SIYB is a popular recreational marina located in north San Diego Bay. In 2017, the Board recognized San Diego Bay as a key area for habitats and ecosystems. Key areas are waters and places where protection and restoration of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of waters is most important for a key beneficial use. Key beneficial uses are the individual beneficial uses and categories that are most critical to protecting human and environmental health.

The Shelter Island Yacht Basin Dissolved Copper TMDL was adopted by the San Diego Water Board in 2004 and established a final target date to achieve the WQO at the end of 2022. The Unified Port of San Diego (Port District) has been taking steps to achieve the SIYB TMDL through its Copper Reduction Program. For instance, the Port District has begun regulating commercial hull paint cleaning and has actively worked with Shelter Island Yacht Basin boaters to convert copper hull paint to non-biocide hull paints. The Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) is the agency responsible for regulating pesticides, including antifouling paints, throughout the state of California. In 2017, DPR adopted new regulations to limit the amount of copper in recreational hull paints in order to protect water quality. DPR recognized the new copper levels were likely set too high to achieve the water quality objective in the Shelter Island Yacht Basin because of the basin's hydrologic characteristics and boat density.

Although the Port has implemented reduction measures, annual monitoring indicates the WQO may not be achieved by the final target date. Specifically, this project would evaluate all available information to determine the appropriateness amending the TMDL or its implementation plan.

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## **2021 TRIENNIAL REVIEW PRELIMINARY LIST**

### **Project 8: Impediments to Sustainable Local Water Supplies**

**Priority: 4**

**Goal:**

Determine the need for a Basin Plan amendment to facilitate sustainable local water supply projects.

**Discussion**

As described in Chapter 5 of the Practical Vision, the creation of a sustainable local water supply includes three aspects: the environmentally responsible use of groundwater and surface water, the creation of new sources of fresh water such as desalination, indirect and direct potable reuse of recycled water, and conservation efforts to reduce water demand.

Specifically, as part of this project, the San Diego Water Board will focus on evaluation of the following:

- **Implementation of salt and nutrient management plans**  
Consistent with the State Water Board Recycled Water Policy, the board shall consider adoption of a Basin Plan amendment, when implementation of a salt and nutrient management plan involves adoption and/or modification of water quality objectives, beneficial uses, or programs of implementation consistent with Water Code sections 13240, 13241, and 13242.
- **Facilitating potable reuse**  
The board may consider Basin Plan amendments where current water quality objectives, beneficial uses, or programs of implementation are determined by the board to unreasonably impede the production and use of recycled water.

Additionally, staff would prepare an issue paper that would identify impediments to sustainable local water supplies and how challenges can be addressed.

**Practical Vision:**

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